

Scalds and Microwave Ovens

Many children under 5 years of age come to hospital emergency departments each year in Australia for treatments of burns and scalds.

1 in 4 of these children will need to be admitted and will suffer intense long-term pain, repeated visits and multiple operations and scarring for life.

Scalds are burns caused by hot liquid, hot vapour or steam. For young babies and children, scalds are often associated with:



- Hot drinks,



- Water being boiled for drinks,



- Cooking and hot foods,



- Hot tap water.



‘Real Life’ Case

A man decided to have a cup of instant coffee. He took a cup of water and put it in the microwave oven to heat it up (something that he had done numerous times before). He set the timer to bring the water to a boil. The timer went off and he removed the cup from the oven.

As he looked into the cup he noted that the water was not boiling but instantly the water in the cup “blew up” into his face.

The cup remained intact until he dropped it out of his hand but all the water had flown into his face due to the build up of energy.

His whole face is blistered and he has 1st & 2nd degree burns to his face, which may leave scarring. He also may lose partial sight in his left eye.

While at hospital, the doctor who was attending to him stated that this is a fairly common occurrence and water (alone) should never be heated in a microwave oven.

To safely heat water in this manner something should be placed in the cup to diffuse the energy such as a wooden stir stick, tea bag, etc. It is however, a much safer choice to boil water in a kettle.

Microwaves are involved in a large number of scalding incidents. This is probably because microwaves behave in ways we do not expect.

Burns and Scalds to children are injuries that can be prevented.

Noodles

Heating Noodles in a microwave oven has caused 2nd & 3rd degree burns to older children.



Noodles are a great snack especially for the busy child cold and hungry when they have just arrived home from school, playing sport or from just playing.

If a hot noodle attaches itself to the skin it will stick, making it harder to remove immediately. This allows the noodle to burn into the skin longer and deeper.

If placed into a child's mouth the same burn can occur.

Safe Practice

Kidsafe NSW, recommend that you heat noodles on the stove, **under adult supervision**, and allow them to cool before eating.



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Bottled Milk

Microwave ovens used for heating babies' or young children's milk or food can cause scalds to the mouth that need extensive medical attention and leave permanent long term medical problems.

The Burns Unit at the Children's Hospital Westmead and Kidsafe NSW have been concerned about an increase in incidents of babies receiving 2nd and 3rd degree scalds in their mouth from bottles being heated in microwave ovens.

Babies' skin is very sensitive when they arrive into the world. They must also adapt quickly to new experiences, like feeding from their mother's breast or a bottle instead of receiving nutrients through the umbilical cord.

Breast milk is received at **body temperature**, while bottled milk is refrigerated until used.

Most parents feel that they must **heat** their babies' bottles. If you decide for personal, medical or any other reason to bottle feed, it is suggested that you only **warm** the milk/formula, and not use the microwave oven for this purpose.

Safe Practice

Instead of using the microwave oven, use a specifically designed bottle warmer or heat water in a saucepan or kettle, and place the baby's bottle into the heated water until it is warm to touch when sprinkled onto your wrist. While the bottle is warming remember to place the **hot** container in the sink or a safe place where no other children can access it.

